

H A L L E L U J A H !

Antonio ran amuck. He was odd job man at a girls' school, and had been a good steady worker for several years, although it was generally known that he had been in the asylum. It was probably due to syphilis, which is all too common, and often appears to be cured when it is not. Very likely when he was in the asylum before, the doctors had given him treatments for syphilis, clearing it up to the extent that he regained his normal mentality, but on discontinuing the treatment the germs had gradually taken control again.

At all events he ran amuck. The first indication anyone had that anything was wrong was when he called D. Gertrudes, early one morning, to see the crate that he had made, at her orders. It was a very haphazard affair, badly constructed, and of quite uncertain utility. She remonstrated with him.

"Antonio, that surely is a poor piece of work. Couldn't you do any better than that?"

"Senhora, the crate is perfect."

In dealing with such people, one must learn a great deal of patience, or go mad right away. But this was too much.

"Perfect! I don't see how you could call this perfect. It's the sorriest piece of work I ever saw!"

But Antonio didn't give an inch. "The crate is perfect, senhora. I made it exactly as the Holy Spirit showed me how to make it."

There didn't seem to be much room for argument here, and besides, other duties were pressing. D. Gertrudes went on, thinking to herself that surely Antonio must be losing his mind -- but not anticipating what followed.

About half past nine o'clock there came suddenly a series of screams from the kitchen, and D. Virginia, the housekeeper, was seen running wildly across the terrace, Antonio in hot pursuit, brandishing a formidable looking kitchen knife as he ran. But D. Virginia was nimble, and terror offset the effects of her years.

She reached her room, and quickly slammed and locked the door. She was safe, but Antonio turned to look for another victim.

Immediately all was confusion — people running to and fro and screaming. Even the schoolgirls caught the contagion, and began to scream, without knowing what it was all about. The next thing anybody saw, Antonio was out on the terrace with one of the kitchen maids, whom he held by the hair, while he belabored her with a fire poker. (Fortunately he had discarded the knife.) And after every stroke he would say, "Say Hallelujah!"

Noone was able to say certainly afterwards whether the poor girl had had wits enough about her to say the word, or whether, if she said it, it served in any way to appease him. Somebody had presence of mind enough to telephone for the police, and before long Antonio was taken into custody. The maid was beaten black and blue, it that is possible for one already black, but not seriously injured. And D. Gertrudes set to work to restore calm and order in the school, after "just another one of those interruptions that a school teacher has to put up with".